

SUFFOLK NANSEMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 23, Issue 3

September 2014



Some of the residents of Bank Street were living large when this picture was taken c. 1920 but not all the neighbors were so fortunate. The comings and goings from the grand houses must have provided plenty of fodder for front porch conversation. Mrs. William Crumpler nee Viola Saunders poses in front of an elegant car.

Talking about the neighbors . . .

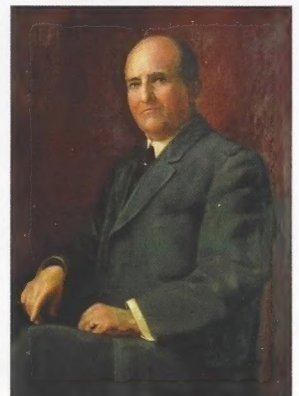
Is it gossip or just exchanging information if you relate facts about those who live around you? The residents of the Eley-McKay household at 133 Bank Street were old timers on a street that was also home to several of their kinsmen. But there were newer families nearby that might have furnished some more interesting exchanges of information.

Let's return in our imagination to 1914. Pull up a rocking chair on the Eley-McKay front porch and pour a glass of lemonade. We'll have a little chat.

The Phillips family had been at (now) 137 Bank Street almost since the area opened around 1880, though their house originally faced Franklin Street. Horace Phillips (1857-1926) was from Delaware and Mrs. Phillips (1855-1936) had come from Whaleyville, Maryland. Here's how a contemporary remembered them years later:

Mr. Phillips was a wealthy lumberman and Mrs. Phillips had been Evie Whaley. Their home was beautifully furnished and they were a strikingly handsome couple as they walked to the Methodist Church on Sunday morning, Mrs. Phillips beautifully dressed and Mr. Phillips in his frock coat, striped trousers and silk hat. *We Are the Poorer for their Passing*

At first their house was much smaller but as their fortune grew so did the house. Perhaps it was about 1914 when the biggest change was made. A large sunroom was added along the Franklin Street side and the entrance was



Gift of Dorris Withers McNeal

From the Virginian-Pilot, back in the day

1913 — The beautiful decorations in Main Street Methodist Episcopal church, on the occasion of the McNeal-Phillips wedding, have been much commented on and many visitors inspected them at the church before they were removed.

moved to Bank Street. An impressive new entrance hall became the star of the show. Maybe all this was a reaction to Mr. Truitt's new house across the street. (The Phillips house is now SNHS headquarters.)

The Phillips had three children: Fred, who died in boyhood; Horace Whaley, who married Em Jones also of Bank Street, and moved to Hardeeville, South Carolina; and a daughter, Margaret, who was married four times. Her first husband was J. Ross McNeal.

Then there were the **Crumplers**. William Mahone Crumpler (1880-1950) was the youngest child of Judge Charles Crumpler and his wife, the former Sallie Beaton, both of the Zuni area.

According to a newspaper article published at his death, William had finished his education in local (Isle of Wight) public schools and was in his second year at Richmond College of Medicine when his older brother, Raleigh, a successful lawyer in Suffolk, died at the age of 26. William then switched to law school at Richmond College, finishing a two year course in one year. With his father and older brother gone, William worked at a clothing store to pay his expenses. According to the aforementioned article, he was assisted by his mother and his sister, Mrs. Fannie Crumpler Parrish (see p. 5). He was 19 when he finished and had to get special permission from the General Assembly to practice law before he was 21.

Crumpler came to Suffolk and, again according to the article, was a successful lawyer from the beginning. He was ambitious.

He soon started buying and building small rental properties. Crumpler courted Miss Viola Saunders (see p. 5) who soon became his bride and mother of his only child, William Mahone, Jr. At Crumpler's death some said he was better known for the real estate than the law practice.

The Saunders. Now don't pass over Viola and her folks too easily. Born in 1885, she was the daughter of B.L. Saunders and his wife, the former Augusta Parker, both natives of Gates County. Now are you listening to this? Through her mother Viola Saunders was a descendant of Hamlin Lee Epps (1794-1870) and his wife Christian Skinner Brinkley Epps (1788-1867) who lived, died and are buried on Desert Road in Nansemond County. A number of SNHS members—not necessarily all acquainted with each other—are also descendants of this same couple.

B.L. Saunders was born in Gates County in 1861. While he wouldn't have remembered the war that was waged during the first years of his life, he certainly knew the struggles of the aftermath. As a young man he came to Suffolk to seek his fortune, armed only with ambition and native intelligence. He took whatever jobs he could find, lived frugally and saved his money.

He bought real estate. He also invested in a wholesale grocery business, traveling by bicycle to call on his far flung customers in the early years. His business flourished. His grocery business was on East Washington Street beside that of M.A. Cross,

another Gates County native. The connected buildings became loft apartments just a few years ago. That project is called East Point.

In 1912 when Ernest Jones's efforts brought about the opening of Suffolk's third bank, American Bank & Trust Co., Jones was named cashier and active executive but B.L. Saunders, a more mature busi-



Judge Charles Crumpler and wife Sallie with children, Raleigh, Fannie, and William M.

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CROCKETT SPRINGS, VA., *July 1st* 1921

*One of the
mountain
resorts
visited by
the Crum-
plers,
traveling
via N&W
Railroad.*

nessman, was chosen as president. He held this position until his death 28 years later. This was a perfect match it would seem, as the American Bank sought to serve the agricultural community that B.L. Saunders knew so well from his days of bicycling to country stores hither and yon.

His son-in-law William Crumpler was named to the bank board and he served for many years as well. Crumpler moved his law office to the bank building. That building at the corner of Main and E. Washington Streets currently houses the School Board offices. *Based on a 1937 Suffolk News article.*

Back to the **Crumplers**. They prospered and lived very well. They had, soon after their marriage in 1904, bought Mrs. Wortley Duke's house which at that time fronted on Bank Street. Perhaps they made some additions.

They were active in church, civic and social organizations. They vacationed in the mountains in the summer (see letterhead above). By 1931, the second year of the Depression that was so painful for many of their neighbors (McKay's business folded and his wife took in boarders), Crumpler listed two addresses—Suffolk and Virginia Beach—as his residences.

Son William, Jr., grew up, went to school and followed in his father's footsteps, joining him in the law practice and the real estate business. He met and married a young teacher, Janice Greene, a native of western North Carolina. They had one child, Viola Janice, called Billie. They lived together—three generations—on the northwest corner of the intersection of Bank and Grace Streets.

In 1950 William Crumpler, Sr., died. Soon after that William Jr. and Janice built a house on Chuckatuck Creek (see p. 5). At some point the Bank Street house was enlarged. The entrance was moved to Grace Street and several apartments were created, one being for Viola.

Now hold that thought — we come back to her.



C. 1920 photo above shows entrance facing Bank St. In the c. 1970 photo below the remodeled house faces Grace Street.



Meanwhile, in 1909, another Delaware born lumberman, **George W. Truitt** (1853-1927), had come to Bank Street and made A BIG SPLASH. He bought the Henry Jones house on the northeast corner of Bank and Grace Streets and apparently demolished it to build what many have called the most beautiful house in Suffolk.

We're told he had stave and related lumber businesses from Capron, Virginia, to Drum Hill, North Carolina, and beyond. His wife Maria Rodgers was from the Cypress Chapel area.

The house was beautifully constructed of the finest materials and was obviously built for fine living. There was a gallery for musicians overlooking the drawing room. The mahogany staircase led to the third floor "ballroom." And, long ago, maybe the '20s, a movie called *Suffolk's Hero* was filmed

Hamblin Collection, courtesy of Library of Virginia.

there. It starred local people and was shown locally.

But of the Truitts we know little but hearsay. We have only our imaginations to provide stories about life in such a house, especially during the Roaring Twenties.

The next owner of the Truitt house was **W.R. Frazier** who bought the place in 1928. Frazier was engaged in many business ventures and was Vice President of the American Bank. He, too, had real estate holdings.

At his death the house was inherited by his son, Dempsey, only surviving child of the Fraziers and grandchild of Mr. & Mrs. Dempsey Harrell in whose Bank Street home the Fraziers had previously lived.

To our knowledge, Dempsey Frazier was never engaged in business or commerce.



Viola Crumpler's view of the Truitt house

Around 1958 when dwindling assets forced Dempsey Frazier to leave the Truitt house—now this is family lore told to us a year or so ago—there was a rumor that the Elks Club (then at Col. E.E. Holland's old home on Bank Street) wanted to buy the Truitt mansion. Reportedly, Viola Saunders Crumpler called son William on the phone and said, "Either you buy that Truitt house or I will. I'm not having the Elks Club next door."

William, Jr., and Janice sold the creek house and bought the Truitt house. They made repairs to the house and worked in the garden. They, and later daughter Billie and family, lived in the house for years. During their time it was the scene of many grand entertainments. It was also featured in a national magazine, *Colonial Homes*, in 1984. When SNHS opened it on Candlelight Tour in 1986 a long line of people waited for the doors to open. It was worth the wait.

The Truitt house was sold two years ago by Billie Crumpler Annas' heirs and is expected to open ere long as a B&B.

Meanwhile, Viola, then William, Jr., died. The old Crumpler house fell into terrible disrepair in the hands of various owners.

It was vacant for some time before being renovated a few years ago by George Hranowskyj and Eric Menden who made some history of their own. Open on Candlelight Tour in 2009, the house is vacant again.

Three corners—three fine old houses with many stories to tell.



Hamblin photo of Bank Street at Franklin Street (L) and Grace Street (R) c. 1935. Note street light and brick street. The front porch of the Eley-McKay house, on which we're sitting as we have our chat, can be seen on the left just past the Phillips House. The Crumpler house is on the right and the Truitt house is just out of the picture on the same side.

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Keeping one's shoes shined and suits cleaned and pressed was part of dressing for success. Hunter's was one of several such establishments in Suffolk in the early 20th century. 602 Main Street would now be on South Main Street.



Miss Viola Saunders c. 1900



Sallie Beaton Crumpler with her two grandchildren James Shepherd Parrish (L) [see report of custody suit below] and William Mahone Crumpler, Jr. (R), when divorce was the subject of whispered conversation.

From the *Virginian-Pilot*, back in the day, 1913 — A child custody case is playing out in Suffolk City Court and the courtroom is crowded with lawyers, witnesses and spectators. The case is Parrish vs. Parrish in which James Shepherd Parrish of Chicago seeks to obtain custody of the 6-year-old James Parrish, from his divorced wife, **Mrs. Fannie Crumpler Parrish**, who now resides in Suffolk. Both Mrs. Parrish and Mr. Parrish are each represented by three lawyers. After several days of testimony from witnesses on both sides of the case, the judge rules that the boy will live nine months of the year with his mother in Virginia and three months with his father in Chicago.



Servicemen at the Elks Club 1940s. Hamblin Collection, courtesy Library of Virginia.



December 7, 1969, *Suffolk News Herald* ran a full page of pictures of the reception following the Norfolk Symphony Orchestra performance in Suffolk. Conductor Russell Stanger talks with hosts Mr. and Mrs. William Crumpler, Jr.



The Crumpler creek house, later home to first one SNHS member then another.

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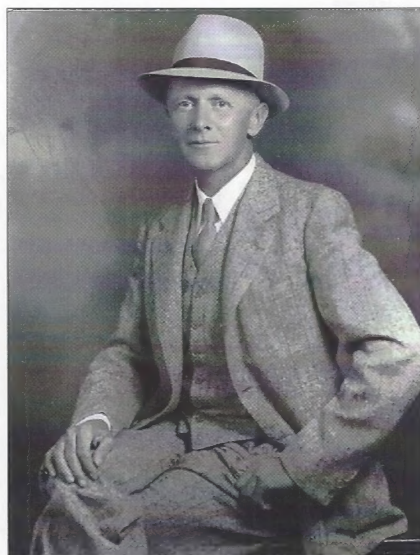
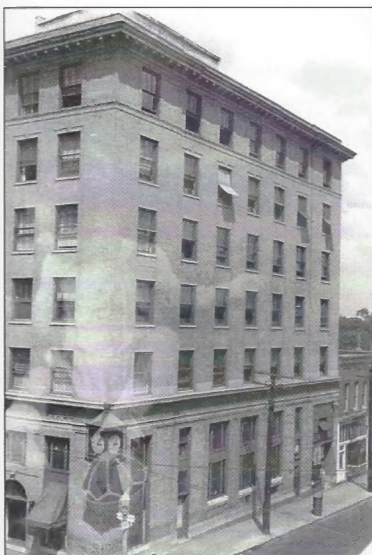
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List current as of August 13, 2014.



Thomas Jefferson School 3rd grade 1915. Seated L-R: John Martin, Alton (Dutch) Brinkley, Charles Butler, **James Parrish**, Wm. (Wissie) Bowers, Robert Modlin, Elwood (Ike) Norfleet, Thomas (Tiny) Andrews, **Wm. (Bill) Crumpler**, Norfleet Pierce, Rufus Baines, Allen Costen, A. Taylor Darden, Hiliary January, Lewis Cohoon. Standing: Elizabeth Smith (Hill), Anna Withers (Rollings), Mabel Jackson (Turner), Thelma Williams (Holland), Nancy Winborne, Sarah Withers (Shelly), Georgie Lee Nelms (Gayle), Louise (?) Walls, Mary Hurley (Story), Dorothy Beaman (Covington), Juanita Seay, Louise Harrell, Marguerite Jackson, Margaret Jackson (Piland), Helen Roebuck, teacher Miss Elizabeth Batts. At rear, Principal Mr. D.T. Duncan. *Photo courtesy Austin Darden.* Jefferson School is now Jefferson Lofts.



American Bank Photos

L-R: C. 1920 photo of American Bank in the hot summertime.

Ernest Jones (1888-1954), first Cashier of the bank and Knight of No Hope in our June 2014 issue.

J.R. Vann (1890-1964), native of Winton, N.C., followed B.L. Saunders as President.



Art Show & Sale Party



Pictures thanks to Lynn and Hugh Cross

A great summer party and art sale were the result of an initial gift of artwork by the late Henry Rawles from his widow **Beverly Rawles**. Pieces of original art from the estate of Oliver and Frances Hobbs were added by **Kermit Hobbs** and **Cindy Hobbs Baker**, then consignment art was brought in by others. We thank them all for a great show.

Thanks to show chairman Mary Austin Darden and her co-chair Lynda Odom and the art committee as well as Linda Bunch of the Suffolk Art League. Thanks to the party committee and pianist Blanche Rountree.

Also, thanks to our sponsors: **Ralph Nahra**, **Hartung's Art Gallery**, **A Friend**, **Mary Austin Darden**, **Bush & Taylor, PC**, **Hugh Cross / Cross Management** and **Mardane McLemore**.

We are grateful to Brenda Wright of Shooting Star Gallery who offered a 15% rebate to SNHS for framing of items purchased from the show.

Calendar of Events



Sept. 6, 9:00- 3:00 SNHS Heirloom Sale
& 7, 1:00-5:00 Phillips-Dawson House

Oct. 4 Touch a Truck, Train & More — after the Peanut Fest Parade @ the Train Station

Oct. 12 Fall Member Meeting

Dec. 6&7 38th Annual Candlelight Tour
 Riverview: Tradition with a New Twist

Thanks to our 2014 corporate members:

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Ann & Dutch Greene

News from the Phillips-Dawson House —

What a summer we're having at the Phillips-Dawson House! Reminds us of the name of a Lion's Club show from long ago—CORN'S A POPPIN'!

Before we could move back into the newly refurbished research room, we had to move out of our upstairs office for plaster repair, painting, new lighting, etc. Julie is working out of the makeshift office in the downstairs study. In the midst of this, she is training Kevin Long, Train Station Manager, as the new SNHS Administrative Assistant to take over her bookkeeping and membership duties on Tuesdays. Before this newsletter goes out, we will be interviewing for the SNHS Executive Director to handle other necessary duties, Monday-Wednesday.

We've just had the successful Henry Rawles Art Show and now it's time for the **Heirloom Sale**. We're collecting items—lots of furniture—for what looks to be far and away the biggest Heirloom Sale ever. **Be sure to put it on your calendar, Sept. 6, 9am-3pm and Sept. 7, 1 pm-5 pm at the Phillips-Dawson House.** Proceeds benefit the Phillips-Dawson House renovation fund.

All the while it's business as usual with visitors, phone calls and emails inquiring about Suffolk and Nansemond County history.

Thanks to **Bradshaw's Picture Frame Shop** for rewiring a vintage light fixture for the research room and to **Hugh Cross** for the gift of a new computer.

Notes from the Train Station —

Disaster at the Train Station: On Thursday, July 24, there were 2 extraordinary rain events in Suffolk. When Kevin arrived to open, he discovered a lot of water on the wood floors and quickly began to mop up the water. A dryer was put in place that afternoon and then we were hit with an even heavier rain that night. Conrad Haas arrived at 10:00 pm with a shop vac to get up an even larger quantity of water. It appears the water came in under a door in the baggage room. Unfortunately, our best efforts to prevent damage were not good enough and our pine floors have cupped and in some areas buckled from the moisture. We are currently working with the insurance company to see if that type of damage is covered. The only room to escape harm is the back waiting room. The committee members spent many hours over the weekend cleaning and moving collection items to waterproof containers. We will keep you informed of the progress being made. As always, we encourage you to stop by for a visit or become a volunteer. *Barbara McPhail*

PRESENTED BY THE SUFFOLK-NANSEMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CITY OF SUFFOLK

SATURDAY
OCTOBER 4, 2014

11AM-2PM

Seaboard Station
Railroad Museum
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(Following the Peanut Fest Parade through Downtown Suffolk)

Seaboard Station Railroad Museum
326 North Main Street

Tickets: \$4 each or 4 for \$14

Tickets available at Railroad Museum or on-site the day of the event.

SUFFOLK NANSEMOND



HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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1915 painting by Suffolk native George Riddick, gift of Beverly Rawles. Riddick was grandson of Lt. Wm. Shepherd, C.S.A., of our June 2012 issue.